

**CITY OF SEATTLE  
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK**

**GUIDE FOR CITIZENS' REFERENDUM**

**An Information Resource for Citizens**

**Updated February, 2011**

*This document is provided to the members of the public for informational purposes only. Persons desiring to become involved in the citizen referendum process should refer to the City Charter, the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) and/or the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) for specific requirements.*

There is case law that exempts some subjects from the referendum process. See the [Initiative and Referendum Guide](#) published by Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington.

Questions or requests for additional information should be directed to the City Clerk:

**clerk@seattle.gov,  
(206) 684-8344 or;**

Physical address:  
**Office of the City Clerk  
600 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Floor 3  
Seattle, WA**

Mailing address:  
**Office of the City Clerk  
PO Box 94728  
Seattle, WA 98124-4728**

**You may also want to consult with a private attorney to seek legal advice.**

A citizens' referendum relating to an ordinance passed by the Mayor and City Council may be exercised by petition signed by at least 8% of the total number of votes cast for the office of Mayor at the last preceding municipal election (except those ordinances necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health or safety, or providing for the approval of local improvement assessment rolls, or for the issuance of local improvement bonds). This guide summarizes some of the requirements for filing a citizens' referendum petition.

**Step 1      RESOURCES:**

The following documents contain specific information for a Citizen-initiated referendum. Copies of these documents are available from the Office of the City Clerk:

- ☐ Seattle City Charter, Article IV, Section 1
- ☐ Seattle Municipal Code, SMC Chapter 2.12 and 2.16
- ☐ Revised Code of Washington, RCW 29A.36.090 and 29A.36.071
- ☐ Guide for Citizens' Referendum An Information Resource for Citizens (this document)

**Step 2      REQUIREMENTS:**

The referendum process is different from the initiative process in several ways. One difference is that for referenda there is no legal requirement that the petition be filed with the City Clerk prior to signature gathering.

Another difference is that the amount of time allowed to gather signatures is typically only 29 days.

Since the signatures have to be filed with the Clerk prior to the ordinance in question taking effect, it is important to check the language in the ordinance regarding its effective date.

And, since there are specific requirements regarding the form of the petition, it is important to ensure your petitions comply with those requirements prior to collecting signatures on them. (see Step 5)

**Step 3      REQUIRED SIGNATURES:**

The number of registered voter signatures needed to qualify a referendum for a ballot is that number representing eight percent (8%) of the total votes cast for Mayor at the last Mayoral election.

*Example: 2009 Mayoral race – 206,286 votes cast, so until the next Mayoral election, 16,503 valid signatures of registered Seattle voters will be required to qualify a referendum.*

Step 4

FILING:

When you believe you have collected a sufficient number of valid signatures on your petition pages to qualify your referendum for the ballot, you may then submit the signed petition pages to the City Clerk. A letter of transmittal containing the name, address, and phone number of the contact person must accompany the petition pages. Also required is an electronic file (floppy disc, CD) of your petition.

When you bring in the petition pages, you will be requested to estimate the approximate number of signatures. The petition pages must be numbered consecutively beginning with the number 1 (one). It is best to schedule an appointment with the Clerk when you are ready to submit your signatures.

Step 5

REVIEW OF PROPOSED REFERENDUM:

Once you have filed your proposed referendum and signed petition pages, the City Clerk can review it for compliance with required form, and will check your petition pages for the following:

- ☐ Is the petition printed on single sheets of paper of good writing quality?
- ☐ Are the petition pages at least 8 ½" wide and 11" long, and not larger than 11" wide and 17" long?
- ☐ Is there a top margin of at least 1"?
- ☐ Are the signature lines numbered, and are there not more than 20 signatures per page?
- ☐ Are the printed words legible?
- ☐ Do the petition pages contain the warning as required by SMC 2.12.020A, and the form as required by SMC 2.12.020B?
- ☐ Is the complete text of the whole ordinance, or the section or part in question, included on the petition form?

Step 6

VERIFICATION PROCESS:

If the petition and submitted pages are accepted, the Clerk will send the signed petition pages to the King County Elections for verification of the validity of the signatures and a count to determine sufficiency.

Step 7

INSUFFICIENT SIGNATURES:

If the certification process determines that the petitions bear insufficient valid signatures, the City Clerk will notify you by phone and by certified mail, attaching a copy of the King County Records and Elections Division notification.

Step 8

REFERRAL TO COUNCIL:

Upon certification from King County that there is a sufficient number of valid signatures, the City Clerk will transmit the petition to the City Council.

Step 9

COUNCIL ACTION – PLACING MEASURE ON THE BALLOT:

The Council will either pass a bill or adopt a resolution authorizing King County to place the qualifying referendum measure on the Ballot. The Council can, at their discretion, put a referendum on a special election before the next regularly scheduled election.

Step 10

ELECTION RESULTS:

The voters will be asked to approve or reject the referred ordinance (or part thereof). If a majority approves the ordinance, it goes into effect. If a majority rejects the ordinance, it becomes null and void.

Following the election, written notification will be received from King County as to the outcome of the vote count. If the measure was approved, it becomes law upon Proclamation of the Mayor (generally within five days after certification of election, with budget-related exceptions).